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Charleston Gazette

Study to test home plumbing for MCHM

By Ken Ward Jr.

By David Gutman

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- West Virginia will fund an independent team of experts to test water in homes to try to determine long-term effects of the Elk River chemical spill, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin announced Tuesday.

Over the next three weeks, the team will test water in the home plumbing systems of 10 private homes: one in each of the nine affected counties, plus an extra home in Kanawha County.

The study -- called the West Virginia Testing Assessment Project, or WVTAP -- will have three main objectives. The team will convene a group of independent experts to evaluate the West

Virginia's testing threshold of 10 parts per billion of Crude MCHM in water -- its usefulness as well as its limitations.

Second, a team of four scientists, led by Andrew Whelton, an environmental scientist from the University of South Alabama, will test water in homes to try to determine how Crude MCHM, and the other spilled chemical, PPH, interact with, and potentially stick to, different types of pipes.

Finally, the study also wants to find out the odor threshold of Crude MCHM -- how little of the chemical can be in the water in order for people to be able to smell it.

"The scale of chemical contamination of the drinking water in Charleston, W.Va., has been unprecedented," Whelton said at a Tuesday-evening news conference with Tomblin. "There is so little data available, many federal and state agencies could not and still cannot answer all the questions West Virginians are demanding to be answered."

Jeffrey Rosen, of Corona Environmental Consulting, will help Whelton conduct the study.

The 10 homes already have been selected. They are homes of people Whelton has been in touch with since he first arrived in West Virginia to do water crisis-related research three weeks ago.

Whelton's team will go into the homes accompanied by staff from local volunteer fire departments. They will sample hot and cold water -- about 21 gallons -- from the kitchen and the most commonly used bathroom. They will examine the plumbing, as different homes may have copper, iron, PVC or other plastic pipes.

Testing will be done at independent labs, and Whelton's team will not report to any state agency.

Once the initial round of 10 home tests is complete, the team will release preliminary results. They will then do more than 100 tests in additional homes around the region, Whelton said.

Tomblin has committed \$650,000 from the state budget to fund the study, but he admitted Tuesday that that probably would not be nearly enough money. He said he has asked West Virginia's congressional delegation for help in securing federal money to further fund the study.

Asked how much federal money he thought would be needed, Tomblin said, "A lot."

"To be frank, this is an unprecedented disaster," Whelton said, adding that "\$650,000 is a lot of money, but long-term monitoring is needed."

He said that with the help of the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, researchers need to begin more toxicological studies and animal studies as soon as possible.

Tomblin said West Virginia American Water President Jeff McIntyre told him at their last meeting that the company would offer money for home testing if the state needed it. The

governor said they have not yet requested any financial assistance.

At a news conference last week, federal officials repeatedly said they thought home testing would not be necessary or helpful. Tomblin did not specifically rule it out, but he was far from enthusiastic about the prospect.

He changed course a few hours after that news conference, saying his administration would look into home testing.

Asked what changed his mind, Tomblin said it was obvious that people wanted their homes tested. He said it was impossible to test every home in the region, but since the chemical's licorice smell has persisted in many places, they would do some home testing.

State and federal officials have said residents can resume using water from West Virginia American Water's regional system, citing test results showing levels of Crude MCHM were below a controversial 1-part-per-million "screening level" set by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But government officials have done no testing inside people's homes.

West Virginia residents in the spill area increasingly have been asking why the state Department of Health and Human Resources and the National Guard are testing water for MCHM only at the water treatment plant, at fire hydrants and in some public buildings, such as schools.

Outside experts have expressed concern that the MCHM and other chemicals from the leak could have been absorbed by home plumbing systems, where it could continue to leach into water -- even if only in very small amounts -- for some undetermined amount of time.

Whelton has compared pipes to a sponge, in which the chemicals could be quickly absorbed but perhaps not so quickly expelled over time.

At last week's news conference, officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said they have a study that disputes this theory, but they have not released a copy of the study.

EPA regional drinking-water chief Bill Arguto suggested a reporter could get a copy from West Virginia American Water. The water company has not responded to a request for the study.

On Tuesday the EPA declined to release the study, citing "water security" issues.

During a congressional hearing on Monday, state Bureau for Public Health Commissioner Dr. Letitia Tierney referenced the study and said that MCHM has a low "partition coefficient," meaning it is unlikely to stick to pipes. Tierney also said federal officials are still looking at the issue.

Whelton said he is familiar with the study cited by the EPA but said it doesn't have enough information to come to any conclusions.

"I would say we don't know," Whelton said when asked how sticky the chemical might be to

home pipes. "There is no data for helping West Virginians understand chemical interaction with plumbing pipe materials.

"There are too many unknowns, and the health and safety of hundreds of thousands of West Virginians and U.S. citizens is in question."

Charleston Daily Mail

DEP investigating coal slurry spill in eastern Kanawha County

by Matt Murphy

Daily Mail staff

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- About 108,000 gallons of coal slurry blackened six miles of Fields Creek in Eastern Kanawha County Tuesday after a coal processing plant line carrying the substance ruptured.

"This has significant adverse environmental impacts," said Randy Huffman, secretary of the state Department of Environmental Protection. "This is a significant slurry spill."

Huffman said a valve seal broke on the coal slurry line at the Kanawha Eagle Prep Plant, a subsidiary of Patriot Coal.

However, pumps moving slurry through the line continued to run for roughly three hours, filling a secondary containment area, which then overflowed into the creek.

"When this much coal slurry gets into a stream, it wipes the stream out," Huffman said.

The spill began sometime between 2:30 and 5:30 a.m. Tuesday, but Huffman said the company notified the DEP about 7:40 a.m. He said an unknown amount of time passed between the time plant employees discovered the spill and the report to the DEP.

Coal processors are required to report chemical spills immediately.

The DEP estimated the amount of spilled slurry based on the amount of time the pumps ran after the valve broke. Huffman said an alarm system designed to alert employees when such an incident occurs apparently wasn't working.

DEP officials were overseeing containment and cleanup Tuesday afternoon. They used a vacuum to suck up contaminants and put them into a containment area. The DEP is also testing water at various points along the creek.

Huffman said the slurry does not contain the coal-cleaning chemical MCHM -- the primary chemical involved in last month's Freedom Industries spill along the Elk River. DEP officials initially believed MCHM was being used at the site. However, the Kanawha Eagle Prep Plant switched last month to polypropylene glycol.

But he also said there are likely chemicals much more harmful than either MCHM or polypropylene glycol in raw coal slurry.

Huffman said a Material Safety Data Sheet obtained by the DEP show polypropylene glycol is far less toxic than MCHM and short-term exposure should cause few, if any, health effects.

A Dow Chemical Co. MSDS for industrial-grade polypropylene glycol found online supported Huffman's statement.

After the Freedom Industries spill last month, the DEP announced it was testing wastewater from every known user of MCHM in the state -- about 36 different facilities -- for the chemical's presence. Huffman said Tuesday the facility where the slurry spill occurred "came back non-detect."

The DEP is planning to take enforcement action against the plant.

In response to questions about whether fines are a good deterrent for companies to comply with environmental regulations, Huffman said monetary penalties might not go far enough in some cases.

"We have to do more than that," he said.

Fields Creek flows into the Kanawha River just south of Chesapeake, and evidence of the spill was evident Tuesday. The slurry was visible for about a half-mile from the river's confluence with Fields Creek.

The DEP has notified water facilities and agencies along the Kanawha and Ohio rivers about the spill.

No public water intakes are located immediately downstream from the spill site. The West Virginia American Water plant in Charleston is on the Elk River upstream from the Kanawha River, and the St. Albans treatment plant is on the Coal River.

West Virginia American Water spokeswoman Laura Jordan said the spill is not anticipated to have an effect on the treatment plant. She said the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health also anticipates no effects on the plant.

Danville Register and Bee

Testing shows city water still within federal standards

By DENICE THIBODEAU dthibodeau@registerbee.com (434) 791-7985 | Posted: Tuesday, February 11, 2014 9:28 pm

“It’s safe; you can drink the water,” Myles Bartos, on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, told a standing room-only crowd in Danville City Council chambers Tuesday night.

Bartos said drinking water tests from the Danville Water Treatment Plant have been consistently good since the coal-ash spill at Duke Energy’s Dan River Steam Station in Eden, N.C., Feb. 2.

Asked if the city has plans in case the water goes bad, Barry Dunkley, director of water and wastewater treatment, said the city keeps a two to three day supply of treated drinking water.

If a problem lasted longer than that, water for some customers could be routed through the Pittsylvania County Service Authority and bottled water would be brought in.

The coal ash leak has been contained, Bartos said.

A dam of sandbags was set up to contain any further drips as the pipe is fully filled with concrete, and a pump is in place to send that water back to the secondary storage basin. Once the pipe is completely filled, the dam and pump will no longer be needed.

One attendee asked if people who have wells need to be concerned, saying his well is only about 200 feet from the Dan River.

John Aulbach, director of the Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Drinking Water, said wells would be unlikely to get water from the river, and the dirt and sand at the bottom would filter impurities should some get in.

Kevin Eichinger, on-scene coordinator for the EPA, said the EPA is overseeing work being done now and coordinating with Duke Energy, Danville officials and all of the government agencies involved in response to the spill. He called it a “unified command” with Duke Energy, with the EPA being the 51 percent partner.

Many people expressed concerns about fish and wildlife, and Sarah Ward, of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, said a team from her organization had been on the river but had not spotted any fish kills — but people at the meeting reported finding dead turtles along the riverbank.

Ward said she would try to set up an emergency hotline so people can report finds of dead

animals and fish.

People also asked about having signs put up along the river to let people know not to swim in the water or eat the fish. Officials said they would talk to Duke Energy about having those installed.

ABC-TV Lynchburg-Danville

EPA Answers Questions from Concerned Citizens on Coal Ash

By Tola Adamson

Danville, VA-- There is lots of concern over the impact the coal ash spill is going to have on the Dan River.

The EPA held the meeting at the Danville City Council Chambers on Tuesday night, and had several other environmental agencies on hand to answer questions from folks who are worried.

The chambers were packed, standing room only with people who wanted answers.

They expressed the same concerns they've had since the beginning. Is the water truly safe?

Over a week after Duke Energy leaked 82,000 tons of coal ash into the Dan River, local residents are raising more and more questions.

"We heard a lot of similar questions from people," said Trish Taylor, Community Involvement Coordinator for the EPA.

The main ones?

"The drinking water and the actual river safety as far as the fish are concerned and the citizens eating the fish," said Dawn Witter, a Danville citizen.

They said to date there has been 122 samples of water taken from different areas of the river and from the local water treatment, all showing that the water is safe.

A representative from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also said they haven't seen detrimental effects to the fish yet.

The EPA, also outlined what they've done so far and what the next steps are.

Many wanted a timeline of the future clean up efforts, But the EPA said that's something they just can't provide now.

"The question about timeline. We'll be doing this in two phases. The emergency response phase, which is the immediate, and then the long term phase which is as soon as the immediate threat is taken care of, we can then look at potential long term effects on the water quality," said Taylor.

It was safe to say everyone in the room wanted to make sure this does not happen again.

"They want Duke Energy to ensure it never happens again. The only way that can be done is if they move their coal ash off of our river, out of these unlined pits, and move it to safe storage, in a lined land fill, just like the rest of us have to put our kitchen garbage in," said Frank Holleman, attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center.

The EPA plans to do more of these public meetings so citizens can stay well informed on the river quality and the efforts to clean it out.

They're planning one in Eden, North Carolina and another in South Boston next week.

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

One missing, one hurt in natural gas well explosion in Greene County

By Jason Cato, Tom Fontaine and Timothy Puko

Published: Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2014, 9:09 a.m.

Updated 2 hours ago

DUNKARD — The thunder of a natural gas well explosion on Tuesday morning in rural Greene County shook Charlie Grim awake, yanked John Kuis away from the television and rattled Michelle Hurley's home as she dressed for work.

“It sounded like a jet engine was parked in my driveway,” said Kuis, 57, who scrambled outside to see fire and smoke rising above the tree line near his Dilliner home, about 70 miles south of Pittsburgh.

The fire at the Chevron Corp. well in neighboring Dunkard raged into the night, shooting flames several stories into the air and preventing authorities from getting closer than 300 yards because of the blistering heat. One worker suffered minor injuries and another remained missing, company officials said.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of these individuals,” Chevron spokeswoman Lee Ann Wainright said.

Chevron flew in a disaster team from Houston to put out the well fire, reported about 6:45 a.m. at the Lanco 7H well. Wild Well Control Inc., which specializes in controlling fires and other problems at drilling sites, has been here before — it tamed a fire from a July 2010 well explosion in Indiana Township that killed two welders.

Shortly after 6 p.m., Wild Well Control specialists were working with Chevron officials to develop a plan to extinguish the fire, the company said. Chevron did not say how long it might take to put out the fire.

State police established a half-mile perimeter around the well as a precaution. People stopped throughout the day to gawk at the flames and smoke.

Grim, 25, and several friends who work in the natural gas industry drove from their homes in a nearby valley to get a better look at the cordoned-off area from Steel Hill Road. None of them knew anybody who worked at the site.

“I figure they were all out-of-towners,” Grim said. “A lot of them are.”

Grim said the accident didn't give him second thoughts about working in the industry.

“To me, it's part of the industry,” Grim said. “And it's either this or coal around here. We don't have much else.”

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Scranton, who chairs a subcommittee on employment and workplace safety, called for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to investigate.

State Department of Environmental Protection spokesman John Poister said a team at the site found no signs of threats to public health, noting the fire burned off volatile organic compounds in the gas.

Officials said 19 workers were at the site when the explosion happened. The DEP said it didn't know what triggered it.

Workers had been connecting the well to a network of pipes to carry gas from the site. It is one of the final steps before starting production, Poister said.

Drilling companies have to be wary of natural gas buildup creating an ignition source, said Michael W. Brinkmeyer, a vice president at Colorado-based Stonehenge Energy Resources LP, which has run pipeline and processing systems in the Marcellus shale.

“If you're doing final connections, you're probably doing hot work, which means welding or some other process like that, so you want to make sure you don't have any gas leaks,” Brinkmeyer said.

No drilling or hydraulic fracturing was occurring. Chevron drilled the well two years ago and fracked it a year ago.

Greene County has the sixth most natural gas wells among Pennsylvania counties, with 641, according to DEP data.

Large pockets of liquid gases such as ethane and propane have become profitable draws for companies such as EQT Corp. and Consol Energy Inc. in north central Greene County.

Chevron's local subsidiary, Chevron Appalachia LLC, obtained 40 state permits for shale drilling in Greene County since 2009, including one for the Lanco 7H well. Most of its wells are on the eastern edge of the county.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Editorial: Green to the rescue? The rebuff for Alcosan's plan is an opportunity

When one door closes, another opens, as the old saying goes. For the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority, that saying holds promise for a better future for the region.

Under the terms of a 2008 federal consent decree, Alcosan must have a plan to eliminate all illegal sanitary sewer overflows into local rivers and reduce outflow of combined sewers by 2026. The authority submitted a \$2 billion wet weather plan a year ago but wasn't itself satisfied with the proposal.

Its plan proposed using conventional "gray infrastructure," such as construction of larger collector pipes and underground storage tunnels, to capture and treat 79 percent of the region's combined sewer overflow. But it wanted more time to draft a plan that includes "green infrastructure" — rain gardens, tree planting, grass rooftops, permeable pavement and rain barrels.

Late last month the door closed on the former, but not on the hope of something better. Although the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency did not formally reject the plan, the EPA did signal that it was deficient because "it does not demonstrate that full implementation will result in compliance with all of the requirements" of the consent decree by 2026. Officials wondered whether green solutions could be tried in a revised plan.

On Friday, a letter from the Justice Department arrived at Alcosan indeed declaring a willingness to renegotiate the consent agreement. The Justice Department "contemplates a high level of regional cooperation and coordination" in a process that it wants to be complete by the end of April. That is the other door opening.

It now may be possible to add green remedies to the plan to capture more of the overflow.

At this stage, nobody knows what effect this will have on future rates for Alcosan's customers — and today's rates are already going up to pay for improvements. But a century-old problem can't be fixed on the cheap and a first-rate city can't have sewage spill into its rivers every time there is a big storm. As it stands, Pittsburgh's rivers are its pride but also its shame.

Chesapeake Bay Journal

Opinion: Do Outside Challengers Fear Clean Water? (By Kim Coble)

Recently, 21 state attorneys general, many from the Midwest, filed a "friend of the court" brief in a federal appeals court seeking to derail the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort. While that is absurd, it is also a tribute to the decades of work that has led to the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint.

We now have in place pollution limits which, if achieved, will restore local rivers, streams and the Chesapeake Bay. We also have state-specific plans and a transparent and accountable process to achieve them. This process, developed with years of collaboration between the states and federal government, is working and demonstrates that when citizens, governments at all levels and businesses work together we can restore water quality.

This “friend of the court” brief is just the latest salvo in the war against the Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint. It began with a lawsuit brought by the American Farm Bureau Federation, its big-agriculture allies like The Fertilizer Institute, the National Pork Producers Council and the National Corn Growers Association that sought to end Bay restoration efforts. In their original legal challenge, they claimed the EPA overreached its authority; that efforts were not based on sound science; and that there were not sufficient opportunities for public comment.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation and others sided with the EPA, and in a 98-page opinion, federal Judge Sylvia Rambo decidedly rejected the arguments of those opposing clean water. She called the collaborative process between the states and federal government used to develop the pollution reduction plan an example of the “cooperative federalism” that the Clean Water Act intended.

The American Farm Bureau has appealed Judge Rambo’s decision. The appeal is now in front of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit in Philadelphia and makes similar claims of EPA over-reach, but the amicus brief from the 21 states provides a telling view of their motivations.

The brief says that “If this [cleanup] is left to stand, other watersheds, including the Mississippi River Basin (which spans 31 states from Canada to the Gulf Coast), could be next.”

The lead attorney on the brief is Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, who has the strong support of agriculture interests in Kansas. A 2010 press release on his campaign website announcing his endorsement by the Kansas Livestock Association (KLA) contains this quote:

"KLA has worked closely with Derek Schmidt on many issues directly impacting agriculture during his tenure as a state senator. Schmidt has the background and commitment to be the state's chief legal advocate as Kansas agriculture faces unprecedented attacks on many fronts, including burdensome federal environmental regulations governing water and air," said Todd Allen, chairman of KLA's Political Action Committee (KLA PAC).

The appeal and the “friend of the court” brief clearly are not about water quality in this region’s rivers, streams and the Chesapeake Bay. They are driven by the fear that if we succeed here it will be a demonstration to the nation that other waterways can also be cleaned. To legally challenge the cleanup in the Chesapeake because it ultimately may result in the cleanup of other waterways defies common sense.

Here in the Chesapeake Bay region we are making progress. Pollution reduction efforts are making a difference and the dead zone is shrinking. These efforts also create jobs that support local economies. Pollution reduction will also reduce the risks to human health.

There is still a long road and a lot of work ahead. Yet unlike elsewhere in the country, we have a Blueprint that shows us what must be done to leave the legacy of clean water for our children and grandchildren. Let your elected officials know that's important to you.

Kim Coble is a vice president of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Distributed by Bay Journal News Service.
